

A Deeper Comparison Upon the Ideas of Environmental Influences of Human Behavior Through
a Philosophical Lens in *Nip the Buds*, *Shoot the Kids*, and *Lord of the Flies*

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“Man is the only creature who refuses to be what he is”- *Albert Camus*

Abstract

This exploration upon human nature and its relationships to the surroundings is not an uncommon theme among writers in the postmodernist era. However this essay is an attempt to comprehend and understand the arguments on both sides of the equation. William Golding's 1951 novel *Lord of the Flies* which was three years apart from Kenzaburo Oe's 1954 novel *Nip the Buds, Shoot the kids*. On different sides of the war, two perspectives arose, proposing an answer to the question of human nature, Oe's view of the naturally innocent, as well Golding's diametrically opposite viewpoint of the intrinsically evil. Both of these novels serve to investigate what people would do if they had no restraints on their own actions. The content of these books share the same types of events, however, create dramatically different results, which begs the question, **how are the views on the essence of human nature differently displayed from the arguments of these two novels?** The absence of standing societal structures along with the rules accompanying it creates an environment that allows the characters to go through drastic changes in morality as well as their nature. This premise is seen through both works, this difference being the reaction to this absence, with one indulging into their animal and uncivilized instinct showing how man is inherently evil and society only keeps these feelings away. While the other maintains innocence and their humanity, showing that violence and animalistic actions are a learned behavior and a product of society.

Introduction and Background I: Golding's "Paradise" and its effects upon the expression of human nature.

William Golding's post World War II novel, *Lord of the Flies*, reveals that, when faced with true free will and no authority, humans will eventually revert to their animalistic and evil nature. The boys crash landing in paradise, a place where they have free will and the chance to create their own society, and find themselves in a downward spiral where they lose their innocence and humanity. Golding's pessimistic view was ultimately influenced by World War II, the extreme loss of life and dehumanizing aspects of war perpetuated the idea that mankind is evil at its core, as reflected in the novel. Golding, through the boys, showcases the corruption of the self, the natural struggle of man, between their savage selves, and imposed societal values, in this case, ends with a rejection of intelligent thought, equality, morality, and ultimately leads to murder.

Introduction and Background II: Oe's creation of a "Paradise" and the societal context of evil.

Kenzaburo Oe's *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids*, reveals how society can strip the essence of humanity and morality, and leads to the abandonment of familial and social values. Similarly to Golding's novel, it reveals the psychological struggle of maintaining one's rationality and compassion within an environment that actively extinguishes all forms of ability to prolong it. Oe uses children as a symbol of innocence, whilst condemning the evils of adulthood, and the consequences of society. Like Golding, Oe's view was ultimately influenced by the inhumanity and cruelty of World War II, which is reflected within his work. Realizing that the children have to fend for themselves, they create their own society and are able to find a feeling of peace, and restore core values of respect, morality, and harmony. Oe argues that society strips humanity

from mankind, creating inequality, crime, poverty and failing to instill core humanitarian values. Oe's work reflects the ideas that war is an inevitable product of humanity, that paradoxically, society was created by mankind to try and live in harmony, however ironically ends up causing the loss of humanity and conflict.

Catalysts of Conflict

The events that create the premise of Golding's work is that the boys are placed onto an island with pure free will, and being given free will, they descend into madness through a downward spiral of events. Furthermore, the island setting also serves to highlight the novel's central themes. The struggle between civilization and savagery is evident in the boys' attempt to build a structured society, only to see it break down into anarchy and violence. The boys' struggle to survive and their primitive behaviors on the island demonstrate the fragility of human nature and the darkness that lies within every individual. These events slowly remove aspects of their humanity and morality until their civilized selves become erased. The killing of pigs ultimately foreshadow the beginning of the end, as Jack throughout the novel dreams of killing a pig, and in such a barbaric way that is inhumane and disrespectful of the environment around it. Pigs, which symbolize good fortune and wealth, and ultimately the rejection of that, leads to the rejection of values and leads to the deaths of the innocent. The rituals that revolve around the beast also begin to reveal the neurotic practices that the boys fall into, placing value into "killing" the beast, which leads to the death of Simon. Ultimately, the boys fall victim to their own nature, instead of progressing, the boys, without a societal net to restrict them, reject innocence and intelligence. Ralph, upon seeing this, "wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart" (Golding 202). Conversely, the outbreak of a plague in Oe's results in the creation of a self governed

autonomous quazi-society, eventually having the peace become corrupted by the adults and those who let society corrupt them. As the hysteria of a plague courses through the village, the villagers abandon their settlement and leave the boys for dead, causing them to be forced to make the most out of their situation. While being excluded, find themselves to be inclusive, taking in those that were abandoned, realizing the helplessness of their situation, they find meaning in helping others, when juxtaposed, they become the antithesis of the villagers and the society they have created.

Setting

In William Golding's "Lord of the Flies," the setting plays an essential role in the novel's plot, themes, and character development; the novel is set on a deserted tropical island, which symbolizes the isolation and abandonment that the boys experience. The setting creates an environment where the boys must survive on their own without adult supervision, which leads to their descent into savagery. The island's lush vegetation and clear water initially give the impression of a paradise, but it ultimately becomes a dangerous and hostile place where the boys' fear and violence take hold. The island's features as well as the weather also reflect the characters' psychological states. The boys' camp is situated in a clearing, representing a space of relative safety and order. However, throughout the novel, the boys venture further into the island's jungle, which is dense, dark, and foreboding, reflecting their growing fear and descent into chaos, as well as nurturing their delusions and fueling their wild nature.

In Kenzaburo Oe's novel "Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids," the setting plays an important role in developing the novel's themes and creating a sense of isolation and oppression, usually

through the hostile nature of the setting. Set in a rural village in post-World War II Japan that is collapsing in on itself after abdicating its duty to the people. The village is isolated from other human contact, a suffocating environment, as the characters are trapped within its boundaries, forced to interact with each other in an almost purgatory-like environment, waiting for the chance to leave. The hostile nature of the environment and the villagers' brutal treatment of the boys create a sense of fear and hopelessness that is seen throughout the novel, creating a desperate, and bleak outlook, within a world that is bred upon cynicism and apathy.

Innocence

Innocence is a relevant theme within both *Lord of the Flies* and *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids*. In Golding's novel, the contrast between adulthood and childhood is a central theme. The novel explores how the boys' experience on the deserted island challenges their notions of what it means to be an adult or a child. At the beginning of the novel, the boys attempt to create a structured society based on the rules and norms of the adult world. They elect a leader, establish roles and responsibilities, and try to maintain order. However, as time goes on, their attempts to create a civilized society break down, and the boys increasingly resort to their more primal, childlike instincts. The breakdown of the boys' society highlights the tension between adulthood and childhood. The boys struggle to maintain the societal norms that they have been taught, as they are confronted with the harsh realities of survival on the island. The older boys, in particular, are torn between their desire to be seen as responsible adults and their fear of the unknown.

One particular character archetype that spans between both novels is the innocent and pure hearted character. Simon is depicted as a quiet, contemplative boy who possesses an innate

goodness and an understanding of the natural world. Simon is often perceived as an outsider by the other boys, as he is not interested in playing or engaging in the same activities as the rest of the group. During a conch meeting Simon, profoundly replies to Ralph, stating that "Maybe," he said hesitantly, "maybe there is a beast." "What I mean is . . . maybe it's only us." (80). This is not only one instance, however, throughout the novel, Simon serves as a moral compass, offering insight into the boys' behavior and encouraging them to act in a civilized manner. He is the first character to recognize the true nature of the "beast" that the boys fear, realizing that it is not an external threat but rather a manifestation of their own inner savagery. Simon also maneuvers around the natural fauna and is easily able to navigate the island, as he often finds himself alone, taking care of the little children and finding peace within. Unlike Simon, within Oe's work, the narrator's brother is younger and more child-like, his brother befriends a dog that is found to have rabies, further revealing his innocence and pure heartedness, which is in a way, a higher sense of humanity, that is felt by all, however, after Minami strikes the dog in the head with a stick, the narrator's younger brother runs away into the forest never to be found again, suggesting a deeper relation between innocence and wildlife, similarly to Simon, the narrators younger brother is able to find peace within himself, in an almost naive way.

The Hunts and The Beast Within

The Hunts are events that occur in both of these novels, symbolize a loss of humanity as the hunters participate in an animalistic and crazed act of violence without mercy. These can be seen throughout both novels, signifying a point of no return and a deeper descent into savagery and a rejection of their civilized selves. Jack, who leads the hunts in *Lord of the Flies* is infatuated with the idea of the hunt, his carnivorous instincts lead him to desire the chase. As

seen through his dialogue with Ralph, saying that “I was working too—”, “But you like it!” shouted Ralph, “You want to hunt!” (Golding 54). Jack uses the excuse of satiating the group's hunger and benefitting with them through hunts, however his true intentions are to enjoy killing, and the act of hunting the pig, this carnal desire to embrace his true self shows that his savage and animalistic side has begun to take over. He begins to obsess over this idea, leading to him organizing a hunt later on, killing a mother pig. As the boys pursue the pig's blood trail, they eventually catch it and kill it violently with the narrator describing the scene, “the air was full of sweat and noise and blood and terror and that Roger ran around the heap, prodding with his spear wherever pigflesh appeared. Jack was on top of the sow, stabbing downward with his knife,” until “hot blood spouted over his hands”, the cruel, inhumane killing of a mother pig shows the true descent into savagery of the boys, embracing the hunt, satiating their savage desires as well as their carnivorous instinct (135). The lack of forethought, and the torturous action of dragging out the pig's death as it's “terrified squealing became a high-pitched scream” (135), shows a blatant disregard for other forms of life, hunting, although being a necessary evil in order to live, should reveal the sanctity of life and its cycle. However the killing of a mother pig, as well as the merciless death it was given, reveals as well as awakens the primitive, cruel nature of the boys, as the hunt was a frenzy of blood, rather than an act which respected the cycle of life and death. The savage nature of the hunt encapsulates the idea that the boys hunted out of a need to kill, to show dominance over nature, as they are put in a place with no restrictions upon their actions, allowing them to embrace their true selves and kill without consequences. The hunt is ultimately the catalyst of the descent into madness and the hunting of the other boys on the island. As Simon struggles to relay the message to the boys that the “beast” is actually a dead man on a parachute, the boys, through their rituals, are infatuated with the idea of murdering the “beast”,

leading to them chanting, “Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!” (152), the delusions of the boys lead them to believe that Simon is the “beast” and having indulged their desire to kill, they have crossed a point of no return, as the narrator states that “The beast was on its knees in the center, its arms folded over its face,” “crying out against the abominable noise” (152). Simon’s voice of rationality as well as his humanity is unrecognizable to the mob as they have lost their sense of humanity, as they are unable to recognize another human from a “beast” signifying the connection between the two, the killing of Simon as a hunt, reveals that the boys believed that humanity and innocence were their true enemies, and that the barbaric killing of Simon shows that at their core, a disregard for other life is a part of the human condition. As the boys converge onto Simon, they [the crowd], “screamed, struck, bit, tore” and that “There were not words, and no movements but the tearing of teeth and claws” (153) Golding’s choice to describe Simon’s death in this in a devolved way eliminates the human confines that the boys have bound themselves in, revealing that the boys have truly embraced their animalistic side and their savagery, using their teeth as well as their “claws” to brutally murder Simon. Their ignorance to Simon’s cries of pain reveals that they truly do not care about others, as the screaming of the pig and Simon only serve to heighten the thrill of their hunt, fueling their savagery and desire to kill. The boys not only murder innocence with Simon, but they try to end morality as well, attempting to eliminate every last child that has not become a savage, embracing savagery, which signifies their true descent into the abscesses of mankind’s heart.

Oe’s idea of the hunt also signifies the descent into savagery and serves as a societal critique; however it argues that crazed violence is the product of society rather than a lack thereof. This can be seen in the hunt in which the villagers, with the help of the army, try to find and kill an army cadet, who left because he did not want to kill others, nor himself. As the

blacksmith of the village describes the situation ““They’re hunting in the mountains. Not just the cadets, they and the villagers are all hunting together.”” even going as far as to say that it is ““Worse than boar hunting””(Oe 37). However, the narrator states that “We were really in the maelstrom of war. And a stupefying crisis, like a beast, was nosing it's dark head towards us. Ah, hunting” (Oe 37). The hunting of the army deserter calls into question the values of society, as the cadet deserted because of his morality, his unwillingness to comply within a society in which these traditional values rule over a sense of humanity. The beast is also an overarching antagonist within the novels, however comprising of different beings. The beast signifies the innate human nature as well as the embrace of evil. As well as the pleasure and power that the beast derives from establishing its presence within a fractured society.

The critique of a society that justifies violence against those who do not, stresses that society is ultimately the downfall of mankind, as singular people cannot wage a war, however, collective groups such as societies can. War and violence is seen as an inevitable product of society and its ability to corrupt the human mind and innocence, as the hunt scenes in both novels reveal the loss of humanity and savagery of those who are actively participating in the hunt. Knowing that they are hunting one of their own as well, and are prepared to show no mercy to a person who wants to show mercy and morality. Refusing to see the error in their logic, the villagers as well as the cadets set out to kill the deserter. However, the only difference is that this time, a group who is supposed to be civilized, is participating in an act which is barbaric. This paradoxical aspect reveals Oe’s critique, as society, created in order to prevent the ideas presented in *Lord of the Flies*, ultimately leads to the same outcome. Faced with the “beast” that is the cruelty and immorality of the villagers, the narrator, with his sense of humanity, is able to foreshadow later events. As the narrator, near the end of the novel, finds himself in captivity by

the villagers, in which they tell him during his trial that ““We can even throw you off the cliff. No one will condemn us if we kill you”, revealing that the society in which they live is still able to murder without consequence, society should be what holds people accountable, however, Oe argues that this subversion of its power defeats its purpose (Oe 186). Revealing that society is an ineffective way of getting people together, as it only creates a system that is able to be subverted by those who have the power within it, which are the adults. Ultimately, when the narrator escapes, he states that “[he] would never be able to escape. Both inside and outside” (Oe 188) signifying that he believes that with the existence of society, he would never be able to express his true sense of humanity as well as his innocence. He understands the truth of the Human Condition, however, with the looming threat of the villagers, he also would never be able to escape on the outside as well, as wherever he goes, he will ultimately find himself within a society. The villagers, being described as “men who were running wildly around searching for me, calling to each other further down, and to the villagers spurred on by bloodlust”(Oe 188), this familiar scene of savagery coincides with the idea that the hunt reveals the loss of humanity and a descent into savagery. The act of hunting a child is also despicable, as the moral values of human life are completely disregarded, as to take away a child’s life, is to take away the potential of a pure soul.

The Loss and Maintenance of Humanity and Contrasting Views on Adulthood

Both novels include acts where the loss and maintenance of humanity is a central theme. As Golding’s novel progresses, the boys begin to lose their sense of morality and their connections to civilization. They form their own society on the island, but it quickly degenerates into chaos and violence as the boys struggle for power and control. One way that the loss of

humanity is depicted in the novel is through the characters' descent into savagery. The boys, who initially try to maintain the trappings of civilization, gradually shed their inhibitions and begin to act on their most primal impulses. They turn to violence and aggression as a means of solving problems, and they begin to dehumanize one another, seeing each other as enemies rather than as fellow survivors. The boys end up being saved by the adults and the novel ends bleakly, revealing that society is the only thing holding the beast within all back.

In Oe's novel the boys in the reformatory are subjected to inhumane conditions and treatment. The adults in charge of the reformatory are seen as maintaining order and discipline at the cost of the welfare of the boys, causing some of them to resort to other means to live, with one going as far as prostitution. The boys are depicted as being brutalized by the conditions of their confinement and by the adults who are supposed to be caring for them. Through the dehumanization of the boys, who are referred to only by their numbers and are treated as if they were mere objects to be controlled rather than human beings, the loss of a sense of human connection and object morality is shown, as the boys, seen as beings that reflect the ideas of *tabula rasa*, had been stripped of their inherent humanity since childhood. The boys are subjected to physical abuse and are denied basic human needs such as food and medical care. They are also forced to participate in cruel punishments, consisting of exercises that are torturous in nature. The world that the adults create also enables the beast inside, instilling values of dominance and savagery. The novel's core idea is that societal and systemic failures had failed to perpetuate the values of an actual society, instead creating cynical, hopeless, victims with no regard for human life. Both the boys and adults running the reformatory are shown to be victims of a culture that prioritizes conformity and order over personal liberty and wellbeing, as well as a society that has neglected to give them the assistance and resources they need to prosper

spiritually and physically. The book also makes the case that, in the end, there is some hope in the characters and that, even in the worst of situations, the capacity to connect with and build relationships with others can give life purpose and lay the groundwork for the restoration of one's humanity.

Conclusion

The novels seek to dig into the root of the human condition, whether or not conflict and war will forever plague human society and prevent true peace. Both of the novels being open-ended, prompt the reader to contemplate the values and themes within the novels, ending with both Ralph and the narrator's fate undetermined, the novels propose the reader to find an answer to the questions that arise within both texts. However, both of these novels provide different outlooks in the fate of humanity, whether it may be hopelessness, or hope.

It is true that "man is the only creature that refuses to be what he is", however it is up to man himself, to refuse what he is, in order to refuse what he is, he must know himself. It is up to man's own self perception to determine in which category that he falls in, as refusing to be what one is, is hopeful in nature, as it means that man knows what he is. Refusing savagery means that mankind can live defiantly against all the challenges imposed, innate savagery is not negative, that man can live in defiance of his cruel nature; however, it is the acting upon savagery that is truly appalling. Even if man is innately pure, then the refusal provides hope for a world in which that man can be nourished properly. The conditions in society contain a role within the creation of the human condition, which provides hope for the future as human beings create their own society, finding refuge in genuine human connection, even in the most turbulent times.

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